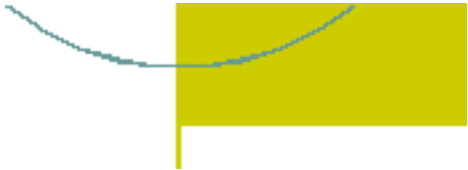


Crime Against Victims With Disabilities Initiative



C V D I

Safety Planning
Resource Guide



**Facts on crime and violence against
people with disabilities**

This guide is not all-inclusive nor does it conclude that any one quality, or combination of qualities, guarantee that a caregiver/ attendant is or will be abusive. It is meant as a guide to provide information about characteristics that are *potentially abusive or lethal*.

- **20% of the population** are people with disabilities.

U.S. Census, 2001.

- **60 to 80%** have such disabilities or have **family members** with such disabilities (assuming an average of 2-3 family members for each person with a disability).



- The rate of violent **crime is 5 to 10 times higher** against people with disabilities than against the general population. Sobsey, 1996.
 - **5 million serious crimes are committed annually against people with developmental disabilities in the U.S.** (under 20% of all people with substantial disabilities). Petersilia, 1998.
 - This **compares to 8,000 hate crimes, 1 million elder abuse victims, 1 million spousal assault victims, and 1.4 million cases of child abuse** nationally each year. Petersilia, 1998.
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- A study found that the **rate of sexual assault was 10.7 times higher and 12.8 times higher for robbery** for people with developmental disabilities. Wilson and Brewer, 1992. Globe, June 10, 2001.
 - Two studies found that **80% of women and 32 to 54% of men with developmental disabilities had been sexually assaulted** (compared to 13% of women in the general population). Hard, 1986.
 - Another study found that **80% of victims of sexual assault with disabilities had been assaulted more than once and 50% had been sexually assaulted over 10 times**. Sobsey & Doe, 1991.
 - One study found that **81% of psychiatric inpatients had been sexually or physically assaulted**. Jacobson & Richardson, 1987.
 - Two major studies have found a serious **crime rate 9.4 times higher** for people with psychiatric disabilities. Lehman and Linn, 1984. Teplin (in process).
 - The rate of **crimes and violence against children with disabilities is 3.4 to 7 times higher** than for children without disabilities. Sullivan & Knutson, 2000.
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Safety Planning for People with Disabilities

Preparing to Leave an Abusive Situation

There are many parts to a personal safety plan, and safety plans help you reduce the risks of abuse or violence that may include escaping a dangerous situation. Your plan should be individualized to fit your given situation, and can be altered at any time.

Following are ideas to consider when developing your personal safety plan, but are not in any particular order of importance.

If you are thinking about leaving an abusive situation, do not let your abuser know of your plans. Be careful not to leave any clues as to where you may go when you leave (such as long distance phone calls or literature about domestic violence services.)

BEFORE you leave, change your payee (if you have one) on your SSI/SSDI benefits to someone ***you trust*** other than the batterer. You (or a caseworker from a domestic violence, disability service agency, or Adult Protective Services) will need to contact the Social Security Administration to change the payee name.

Planning ahead means thinking about your finances. Open a savings account in your name only. Have your benefit checks direct deposited into that account. You may be able to have money placed into two accounts, if having your check deposited into a new account will arouse suspicion. If you can, save as much money as possible. This may seem sneaky or deceptive, but it may mean your survival.

You may consider obtaining a P.O. Box for your own use. Hide the key or give it to a trusted friend or relative.

Gather money, an extra set of keys, medications, necessary medical supplies, spare adaptive aids, and a packed bag with a few changes of clothes for you and your child(ren) and leave those items at the home of a trusted friend or relative.

Assess your own resources. Figure out if you have people (friends, family, church or synagogue members, etc.) who would be able to let you stay with them or lend you some money to make the transition. Find out if they can help you arrange to leave without the abuser knowing.

If you drive, make sure your car is in good working order. Never let your car go below a half tank of gas.

Consider applying for special or para transit services. A doctor or caseworker can certify your disability if you have seen them for services before.

Look for local resources, and keep their information handy. There are many shelters and local hotlines available in most areas. Ask them for help in strategizing your safety plan. Bear in mind that many of the shelters can be full. Most likely, if you are turned down, it is not because of your disability. Ask to be put on their waiting list, if that particular shelter meets your needs best. Safety planning is very important at this stage. A person in an abusive situation is most likely to be seriously injured, even killed, upon leaving a relationship than at any other time.

Look up disability related service providers and disability rights organizations listed in your local phone book (support groups, independent living centers, etc.) and ask for assistance with locating accessible housing or other support services.

Call Adult Protective Services (APS) and report the abuse. Let them know if your health and safety are at stake. They must take down all self-reports. Ask them what the process will be for investigation and services. Not all APS reports mean you will end up in a nursing home placement. Tell the social worker your wishes and let them see if they can help you reach a level of safety in a temporary living situation you would like.

Leaving An Abusive Situation

When you leave your abuser, write a note that says you have gone to the doctor, or another place that will not create suspicion in their mind. This will give you a head start without them realizing you have left.

Do not use any credit card or ATM card that will leave a record of where you have gone. It is best to have changed the billing address on credit cards to a P.O. Box or trusted source before you have to use it.

If you must call anyone that knows the abuser, be sure that you use call blocking to prevent the phone you are using from being detected through caller-ID or call return.

Having to leave an abusive person is a process for a person with a disability just as it is for a person without a disability. For persons with disabilities, it may take longer to leave an abusive relationship because of extra, necessary preparation.

Leaving an abusive relationship is very difficult, and is one of the bravest, most frightening experiences a person can go through. However, being abused, whether or not you have a disability, is ***NOT your FAULT!***

Red Flags for an Abusive or Potentially Abusive Caregiver:

BEWARE if a caregiver or attendant:

- Is unwilling to provide you or a home health agency with background references, including a criminal background check;
- Continually disregards your directions regarding how you need your care provided;
- Has a past history of abuse, or you have heard reports of abusive behavior, and/or criminal record of physical violence or sexual offenses against partners, people with disabilities, children, elders, or animals;
- Tries to control you or manipulate you when you try to assert your wishes about your care;
- Tells you that you are not in charge, or that because he/she works for an outside agency, he/she does not have to do what you ask them to do;
- Is under the influence of alcohol or illegal drugs while providing you with personal care services;
- Treats you and/or your body like an object or without regard or respect, or is unnecessarily rough with you when performing personal care tasks;
- Continues to treat you in a patronizing way even after you have asked him/her to stop or tries to punish you or control your behavior as though you were a child;
- Uses verbal or abusive tactics and/or emotional abuse;
- Does not assist you or threatens to not assist you with medications necessary for your daily functioning or survival;
- Takes away or threatens to take away your adaptive/medical equipment needed for your daily functioning or survival (i.e., wheelchair, respirator, telephone, communication device, walker, TTY or hearing aid, etc.);

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- ☐ Asks to borrow money or takes your food; or steals money or personal items with or without your knowledge;
 - ☐ Tries to force you to eat, take medications or vitamins when you do not want to;
 - ☐ Attempts to control your visitors or does not allow you to see your friends or family, or attempts to control your outside activities;
 - ☐ Does not provide you with assistance with cooking or eating or leaves you without food for long periods of time;
 - ☐ Utilizes your home, money, vehicle or other resources with or without your knowledge or consent to meet their personal needs or in commission of illegal activities (i.e., drugs, DWI, prostitution);
 - ☐ Denies you access to your money or financial records or does not allow you to make choices regarding how you want to spend your money;
 - ☐ Threatens to report you as an unfit parent because of your disability or denies you access to your children;
 - ☐ Leaves or threatens to leave you unattended for long periods of time and without a way to call for help;
 - ☐ Tells you that he/she is the only one who loves, cares or accepts you and he/she is the only one that will care for you;
 - ☐ Threatens, displays or uses a weapon against you;
 - ☐ Threatens to hurt you (or your children, family, service animal, or pets) if you try to leave or tell anyone about the abuse that you are experiencing;
 - ☐ Touches you or your private body parts in a way that makes you feel uncomfortable or when it is not necessary or without your permission;
 - ☐ Forces you to have sex, perform or observe sexual acts against your will;
 - ☐ Tries to convince others that you are crazy, stupid or incompetent, or tells you that no one would listen to you or believe you because of your disability; and/or
 - ☐ Threatens to or puts you in a nursing home, other facility, out on the street or other undesirable living situation against your will.

General Crime Prevention Tips

People with disabilities often face physical challenges. This could make them vulnerable to would-be assailants who assume the person with disabilities is incapable of protecting themselves.

If you are a disabled person, or know someone who is, the following information may be helpful. Take time to read these tips and remember them. You may be able to prevent yourself or a friend from becoming a victim of a crime.

Away From Home

Know and avoid situations and locations that could invite crime, such as dark alleys and unlit parking lots.

Decide what you are going to do in the event you are confronted: Will you scream "leave me alone" or "get away from me"? Will you carry a whistle? How will you react if you are approached? It's best to think ahead so that you can be prepared.

Be aware of your surroundings. It's important to watch the environment you are in. Look ahead of you, pay attention to who is behind you, and look around now and then. This helps you know if someone is near you that should not be, and keeps you ready to react if you need to.

Home Security

If you don't have one, have a peephole installed on your door. Be sure that your doors and windows lock properly. Use sticks to place inside the sliding part of the door or window so no one can open it enough to get in. A hardware store will cut these for you. Be sure to lock your doors when you are home as well as when you are out.

Never open the door for a stranger, even if they claim they need help. If they are persistent, call 911 and let the stranger know you are calling the police. Never tell a stranger that you are home alone or that you have a disability.

Plan a way to get out of your home in the event of an emergency, such as a fire, or if someone does break in.

Consumer Crime Prevention Tips

When someone solicits you for money, remember that it is YOUR money... If you want to give money, pick a favorite charity and do so. Then remember that anyone in real need can get assistance from many organizations and charities.

If you do decide to give to a solicitor, always ask for their identification and call their agency for verification that they are a legitimate agency and employee or volunteer for that organization.

Do not commit to charitable donations or purchases over the telephone. If someone calls you and asks you to buy something, tell them you never purchase over the phone, and hang up. Some people may ask for your address to mail information, but don't ever give your address out. If they have a legitimate reason for having your address, they probably already have it. If you are not familiar with the organization, call the State Department of Consumer Affairs or the Better Business Bureau.

When you make a decision to purchase something, be sure to read the contract before you sign it. Never sign anything without reading it. If you need help reading or understanding the contract, ask a safe person to go over it with you.

If someone approaches you with a "once in a lifetime" deal—Don't believe it. This is nearly always a ploy to separate you from your money!

Consider having your checks sent directly to the bank to avoid mail theft or robbery.

Never open your wallet out in the public. If you are preparing to take a bus, have your ticket or change ready. Don't loan change to a person at the bus stop. Remember, it's YOUR money!



Travel Safety

Whenever possible, travel with someone you know. Be sure to let family or friends know where you are going and how long you will be gone.

When waiting for a bus, train, or other transportation, wait in a centralized location near other passengers. Don't leave your baggage alone, even to go to the bathroom!

Ride as close to the driver or conductor as possible when taking the bus or train, especially during late hours.

Keep your purse and packages on your lap, not on the floor or on the seat next to you.

Don't carry lots of money with you. Use travelers checks instead. These are registered and you can get your money back if they are stolen.

Be aware of your environment and people around you as you leave the bus or train. Always pay attention to others.

If you have a speech or hearing impairment, always carry a card of communication symbols.

If you need help, go to a store, bank, or a business. Ask for help from an employee only, not a customer of the business. An employee will usually contact someone for you, or help you. A customer is a stranger.

When A Friend Or Relative Tries To Hurt You

Sometimes, people we love and trust get mad at us. Sometimes, a person that is supposed to be your friend or caregiver tries to harm you, or touch you in ways that are not appropriate.

When this happens, treat this person as you would a stranger trying to hurt you. Say "leave me alone" loudly, or go tell a supervisor.

You have a right to be taken care of without being harmed or wrongly touched in any way! Tell a supervisor, and keep telling until they take the proper steps to prevent this person from harming you or someone else. Call a social worker if you have to, or your safe person. You have the right to be safe!

**When you need
help**

If you become a victim of a crime, get help immediately by:

- Calling the police
- A doctor
- The sheriff's department
- 911
- A friend
- A relative
- Your safe person

Try to remember everything you can about the assailant, such as what they were wearing, the color of their hair, any identifiable marks, or anything else that might identify them.

Try to remember, if you were traveling, what street and in front of what place the incident happened.

While it may be difficult, try not to destroy any possible evidence before the police or sheriff get there to take the report. Sometimes, in a group-home setting, if you've been physically or sexually abused, the workers will want to help clean you up so you won't feel "dirty."

It is important not to take a shower or clean up until AFTER the police have come and you have been taken to an independent doctor for an exam! Taking a shower or bath will remove any evidence that you have been assaulted!

Although this may be difficult for you, it's important to remember not to allow anyone to clean you up before you've been seen by a doctor. By refusing to be showered or bathed, the police can have evidence to prove that you have been assaulted, and the person that harmed you stands a better chance of going to JAIL for what they've done!

This may be difficult, but it is one of the most brave things you can do to help yourself and others by being able to prove in court that someone hurt you.

Remember, you have rights...

The right to live as independently as possible, to have friends, a boyfriend or girlfriend, the right to spend your own money, and the right to safety.